

# KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: THE CASE OF THAI PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS\*

**Richel C. Dapudong**

Learning Support Department, Garden International School, Rayong, THAILAND, &  
Graduate School, Holy Cross of Davao College, Inc., Davao City,  
PHILIPPINES.

[richeld@gardenrayong.com](mailto:richeld@gardenrayong.com), [richeldapudong@gmail.com](mailto:richeldapudong@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*Thailand amended legislation to allow children with disabilities to attend regular public schools. However, a variety of cultural considerations influences teachers' responses to this legislation. This study uses descriptive-survey method to investigate Thai teachers' knowledge and attitude towards inclusive education of children with learning disabilities (LD) in public primary schools in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand in the school year 2011-2012. Three hundred ten general education teachers completed a modified- translated-to- Thai-Language version of Opinions Relative to the Integration of Children with Disabilities (ORI) survey. The respondents had partial knowledge on the provision of legislation and exhibited moderate knowledge on the symptoms of learning disabilities. The Thai public primary school teachers had a favorable attitude towards inclusion of LD children in regular classrooms in terms of their beliefs, feelings and actions. There is a need for Thailand to open up more training and qualification advancement programs to improve the knowledge and attitude of the Thai teachers. The officials of the Ministry of Education possibly will transition the previous education system toward a system that now integrates children with exceptionality, provides teachers with scientific research and model of change to help indicate the kind of educational change and/or program needed in order to work with students with disabilities and designs advocacy program to create less discriminating society. Finally, there is a need to investigate explicit details about teacher attitudes as they relate to inclusion, student's learning, classroom management and the emerging factors related to perceptions of how inclusion will affect behavior and the school environment.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge, attitude, inclusive education, learning disabilities

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusion, or organized placement of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, has certainly been one of the major topics in education for the last two decades. However, it was not until quite recently that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with special educational needs (SENs) became the focus of extensive research.

The major reason for this change in research interest could perhaps be traced to more contemporary approaches to education, which claim that in order to gain valuable insight into the practice as well as the dynamics of the inclusive classroom, there is perhaps no better method than to evaluate the attitudes of those who form an important part of that dynamic

---

\* Initial finding of paper were presented at Education and Development Conference 2013 by Tomorrow People Organization on March 5-7, 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand

system; namely, the teachers (Rose, 2001). Indeed, teachers' attitudes have been found to affect the process and the outcome of inclusion to a great extent.

Several major initiatives have been taken internationally to support inclusive education. The United Nations Convention of 2006 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities places an obligation on governments to ensure a fully inclusive education system for all children and forms a guideline for education systems to adopt this approach. The World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000 originally promoted this by establishing a goal of providing quality basic education for all children, young people, and adults by 2015. For many countries, though, they are still struggling to manage and implement an education system that justly caters for diversity (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2008). By 2009, which is half way to achieving the Dakar goals, at least 75 million primary school-aged children have still never been to school with more than half of these living in countries affected by conflict (Save the Children, 2009).

Thailand, like any other nations values education. However, the political, economic, and social system of the State underpins a unique kind of education system. The State provides free services to individuals with disabilities so all members of society may benefit from equal education and medical care, and participate in the social and economic dynamics of their communities. This principle, in theory, is one that evokes the idea that children with disabilities, similar to their typically developing peers, are a part of Thai society (Thawiang, 2006).

The problems originate not just from borrowed theory, but in part from the unique educational environment of Thailand, particularly when contrasted with culturally-related nations. Children with learning disabilities are being educated in the general education environments, which is a new concept for the Thailand education system. Unfortunately, this legislative change is happening without focusing on educating and preparing teachers to deal with children with learning disabilities in the public primary schools, Thailand. Moreover, Thai teachers are not able to fulfill the standards for becoming highly qualified special education instructors.

Thai Teachers strongly agree in theory with the educational changes mandated by law. However, the degree of support the Thai educators will give to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general educational setting, in terms of a teacher's willingness, qualifications to fulfill the requirements, and attitude towards the new regulations in general, as well as their knowledge on learning disabilities are not known.

This study attempts to discover the Thai teachers' knowledge and attitude on educating children with learning disabilities in public school settings. Findings will give Thailand educational officials greater knowledge of the degree of the teachers' knowledge and attitude to work with students with learning disabilities. The study also addresses and determines the extent of Thailand's need to establish a program for properly preparing teachers to handle the integration of children with learning disabilities.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study attempts to investigate Thai primary school teachers' knowledge and attitude towards the new amendment requiring inclusion of students who have learning disabilities into public primary schools in Thailand.

The specific objectives of the study are:

First, to determine the profile of Thai primary school teachers in terms of sex, age, degree held, years of teaching experience, area of specialization, training in special education, and experience in teaching students with disabilities in the classroom;

Second, to determine the level of knowledge of Thai primary school teachers in terms of provision of legislation, and symptoms of learning disabilities;

Third, to determine the level of attitude of Thai primary school teachers in terms of their beliefs (core perspectives), feelings (expected outcomes of inclusion), and actions (classroom practices);

Fourth, to determine the differences in attitudes of Thai primary school teachers when grouped according to sex, age, degree held, years of teaching experience, area of specialization, training in special education, and experience in teaching students with disabilities in the classroom;

Fifth, to design a feasible intervention program to improve the knowledge and attitude of Thai primary school teachers towards inclusive education of children with learning disabilities.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The theory on Inclusive Education (Ochiai & Jimenez, 2002) states that inclusion enunciates the right of the children with special needs to qualify education thus, it showcases an emblem of hope that the children with disabilities must be treated equally as others are, with support services. Mittler (2000) supports this idea adding that inclusive education responds to the diverse needs of all children using the variety of innovative practices to get children with special needs involve and participate in the learning process. He stresses that inclusive program provides an adaptive curricular route to those children with disability who cannot cope with the general curricula. Corbett (2000) supports the idea that inclusive education recognizes and endows children with special needs the accommodation by designing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure quality education for them.

Moreover, in his theory on teachers' attitude towards inclusive education, Stewart (2001) points out that teachers' attitude towards inclusive education reveals their abilities to meet the individual needs of students with disability. He accentuates that teachers who are knowledgeable and have training and background in handling children with special needs drew positive attitudes.

Evidently, early investigations of teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities were not clear given their complexity. Antonak & Livneh (1988) articulated that researchers have been investigating linear attitudes ignoring the fact that attitudes have "multiple, interactive antecedents and that the behaviors they predispose the individual to display have multiple facets". Thus, literature on teachers' attitudes has become a well-documented module in the literature known recently as "Cognitive-affective-contrived" (knowing-feeling-acting) attitudes analysis. Interestingly, although this module of attitude structure is famous, there have been few investigations of this concept. Seemingly, literature and researchers have focused on teachers' attitudes toward students with learning disabilities, not on the methodological issues associated with investigating the concept of attitudes. The following briefly describes the three modules of attitudes' complex structures: (a) cognitive module, (b) affective module, and (c) contrived or behavioral module.

### **Cognitive Module**

Beliefs, whether good or bad, appropriate or not, reflect the cognitive component of attitudes. Hannah and Pliner (1983) illustrated the cognitive module suggesting it bears categories of

stimuli and the characteristics and opinions associated with each classification (p. 292). An example of this component is an investigation of the attitudes of the general population and teachers toward the integration of students with disabilities which employed the Attitudes toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) scale. The scale measures teachers' knowledge and biases in terms of the mental perceptions of typically developing students and students with special needs, as well as ways to treat them the same.

### **Affective Module**

The module of affective attitudes is the expression of emotional sensitivity (feelings) toward an issue or an individual through verbal statements conveying likes and dislikes. For instance, teachers may express their attitudes toward students with special needs by saying they neither like nor dislike providing services to this group of students (Antonak & Livneh, 1988).

### **Contrived/Behavioral Module**

Many scholars have stated that since attitudes are complex and related to covert behavior, attitudes have an "action tendency." This is due to being able and ready to behave in a specific way associated with a particular feeling, yet at the same time, it does not cover the actual behavior itself. The Behavioral Preference Ranking (BPR) and Social Distances Scales (SDS) measure these types of attitudes. These two scales assume that participants will respond according to their intentions. The SDS is a scale which investigates and explores the degrees to which an educator is willing to include students with disabilities in their classroom by asking teachers questions related to what they perceive as the best placement for students with particular types of disabilities (example; whether to place them in full-time or partial pullout programs in public primary school), (Antonak & Livneh, 1988).

### **Inclusion**

According to the Center for Mental Health Schools (1998) in California University, the term *inclusion* denotes to the practice of educating children who have disabilities in classes along with their peers who do not have disabilities. Bateman and Bateman (2002) explained that the term *inclusion* is not a precise term because it is often confused with similar concepts such as *least restrictive environment (LRE)* and *mainstreaming*.

Unlike mainstreaming (which means moving students from separate schools and classes to regular education classes for part or all of the school day) and the LRE (which means students may receive special education and may also participate in general education setting), inclusion implies that students are needed to be taught outside the regular education classroom only when all available methods have been tried and failed to meet their needs (Bateman & Bateman, 2002). It is a movement that seeks to create schools and other social institutions based on meeting the needs of all learners as well as respecting and learning from each other's differences (Salend, 1998). This means that the special students have the right to be educated in a general setting classroom given that a specific teaching method or approach works for him or her. In a sense, inclusionary schools should seek to establish communities of learners by educating all students together in age-appropriate, general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools (Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

Rudd (2002) emphasized that inclusion is not to be called inclusions when there are no supports and services given to special students to help them cope in the general classroom setting. It does not also cut back special services and does not assume that all the children in the general classroom setting should learn in the same way. Rudd (2002) also emphasized that inclusion or inclusive programs should not ignore the concerns of the parents. It should also provide special education services in the general classroom and not in a separate place.

### ***Advantages of Inclusion***

The philosophy of inclusive education envisions the idea of providing opportunities for students with disabilities to study as equal partners with their classmates without disabilities (Mitchell, 2008). It is believed that if students with disabilities receive appropriate accommodations and proper support, their educational and social performance will be enhanced. Furthermore, inclusive education can counter the stigma associated with labeling as these two groups of students will have opportunities to accept and understand each other. In addition to benefiting students with special educational needs, inclusive education can result in improved academic skills, a greater recognition of social justice and the development of a more caring attitude toward others (Salend, 2008). Thus, an inclusive classroom is one in which the continuing emphasis on valuing individual differences leads all pupils, irrespective of social or cultural background, disability or difficulty in learning, to succeed in terms of the fulfillment of academic and social goals, and the development of positive attitudes to self and others (Alban-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2001).

The inclusion of special students in the general classroom is viewed by many researchers as advantageous in a sense that they believe special students or students with disabilities in this setting can develop better social development, better social interaction, enhanced skill acquisition and generalization, better health, more independence, greater success in meeting the objectives of their IEPs, and more normalized functioning (Burnette, 1996).

According to the research of Lipsky and Gartner (1997), inclusion can help children with disabilities reduce their fear of human differences. This is accompanied by increased comfort and awareness, growth in social cognition, improvement in self-concepts, development of personal principles, and warm and caring attitude toward peers and friends.

In another study, Moore et al (1998) found that students with moderate to severe disabilities can develop academic increases, and behavioral and social progress through inclusion. Accordingly, they found that it is not recommendable to segregate these students because in segregated sites, they do not receive a greater concentration of special education resources, degrading their traditional skills domain and social competence learning.

Almost similarly, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1997) stated the following as advantages of inclusion to children with disabilities: demonstrate increased acceptance and appreciation of diversity; develop better communication and social skills; show better development in moral and ethical principles; create warm and caring friendship; and demonstrate increased self-esteem.

Odom et. al (1999) also preaches the good news about inclusion as their study shows that inclusion of students in general classroom settings produces positive outcomes. Parents and teachers are supportive of such program and a wide range of curricula are being used to make sure they are really effective for students with disabilities.

It has also been reported that inclusion can be an advantage because it gives and ensures children with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, an important consideration in recent IDEA amendments (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998). Furthermore, inclusion can also provide opportunities for expanding social networks and forming new friendships (Scruggs & Mastropiere, 2001).

### ***Legislations and Government Programs***

There were several international initiatives that took place to support and promote inclusive education. The UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994) calls on the international community to endorse the approach of inclusive schools by implementing practical and strategical

changes. The UN Convention on the rights of the child contains several articles which taken together, provides the right to inclusive education. These initiatives have led to a considerable growth in the literature on integration and inclusive education. In general, it has developed in 3 main directions, understanding the practice of inclusion as it related to different disabilities and difficulties, understanding the factors which help build inclusive schools which can respond to diverse needs and comparing the efficiency of separate special education and inclusive education (Jenkinson, 1997).

In addition, cross-cultural studies on legislation show that Great Britain has produced a document of major significance of special education in England, Scotland and Wales (Karagians & Nesebit, 1981). This document is the Warnock Report, published in 1978, and in November 1998 the labour government published a programme of action for greater inclusion of disabled children in mainstreamed schools (CSIE, 2000). The report shares some features with P. L. 94-142 of the United States, such as the principle of mainstreaming, extending the scope of special education to include other services, such as early identification and intervention. In Canada, the amended Schools Act 1987 calls for the placement of all students in the regular class unless such a placement proves detrimental to the needs of the child or other children (CSIE, 2000).

Furthermore, cross- cultural research has been extended to encompass the Arab world. In collaboration with UNESCO, some of the Arab countries, namely Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates signed an agreement in 1991 to adopt the basic principles of special education for children with special needs. It was meant to recapitulate what was more of baby step towards special education in the 1960 and 1970. The Arab states started developing programs in 1991 which included methods to ensure the training of educators, making them well equipped in the field of special education (Yacoub, 2000).

In the Philippines, stated from the Handbook on Special Education in 1997, as cited in Saludes & Dante (2006), that there are legal mandates based on the 1935 Commonwealth Act No. 3203, a provision in the care and protection of disabled children. *Republic Act Nos. 3562 and 5250* approved on June 1963 and June 1968 respectively provided that teachers, administrators, and the supervisors of special education should be trained by the Department of Education and Culture. *Republic Act 7277* approved on January 22, 1992, known as Magna Carta for Disabled Persons affirms the full force participation and integration of persons with disabilities in the mainstream of society and the provision of education for people with disabilities Furthermore, the latest is the proposed Special Education Act of 2004 by two Southern Mindanao Representatives, Congressmen Arthur Pingoy, 2<sup>nd</sup> District, South Cotabato and Suharto Mangudadatu of Sultan Kudarat which was approved and endorsed by Senator M.A. “Jambie” Madrigal as Special Education Act 2004 under S.B. 1096 but still on its first reading.

#### ***Special Education Act of 2004***

This is an Act establishing at least one special education (SPED) center for each school division and at least three SPED centers in big school divisions for children with special needs, creating the implementing machinery thereof, providing guidelines for government financial assistance and other incentives and support, and other purposes (Committee Affairs Dept., 2005 cited in Saludes & Dante, 2006).

#### ***Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004)***

This is the United States law that guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education. Under this act, public schools are required to design and

implement an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) tailored to each child's specific needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) IDEA 200 is the federal law that secures special education services for children with disabilities from the time they are born until they graduate from high school (Spear-Swerling & Lavote, 2006). The law was reauthorized by Congress in 2004, prompting a series of changes in the way special education services are implemented (Spear-Swerling and Lavote, 2006 as cited in Saludes & Dante, 2006). The Act, Americans with Disabilities Act Of 1990 (ADA 1990) guarantees equal employment opportunity for people with learning disabilities and protects disabled workers against job discrimination (National Institute of Mental Health, 2005).

In Thailand, the National Education Act, B.E. 2542 (1999) provides special education to the underprivileged and individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities. It also emphasized that special education has to be provided in an appropriate form according to individual needs. In addition, the Ministry of Education designated 1999 as the "year of education for disabled persons" and laid down several plans to enlarge educational opportunities for persons with disabilities through the promotion of integrated education in regular schools and the improvement of special education (ONEC, 1999).

### ***Definition, Types and Symptoms of Learning Disabilities***

A learning disability is a neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store, and respond to information. The term learning disability is used to describe the seemingly unexplained difficulty a person of at least average intelligence has in acquiring basic academic skills. These skills are essential for success at schools and work, and for coping with life in general (Harasymiw, Horne, and Lewis (1976).

According to Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDAA, 2005), the symptoms of learning disabilities are a diverse set of characteristics which affect development and achievement. Some of these symptoms can be found in all children at some time during their development. However, a person with learning disabilities has a cluster of these symptoms which do not disappear as s/he grows older. The following are types and symptoms of learning disabilities:

#### ***Dyslexia***

Children with this type of learning disabilities have a language and reading problem. Some specific symptoms are: reads slowly and painfully, experiences decoding errors, especially with the order of letters; shows wide disparity between listening comprehension and reading comprehension of some text; has trouble with spelling; may have difficulty with handwriting; exhibits difficulty recalling known words; has difficulty with written language; may experience difficulty with math computations; decoding real words is better than nonsense words; and substitutes one small sight word for another: a, I, he, the, there, was .

#### ***Dyscalculia***

Children with this type of learning disabilities have problems with arithmetic and math concepts. Some specific symptoms are: shows difficulty understanding concepts of place value, and quantity, number lines, positive and negative value, carrying and borrowing; has difficulty understanding and doing word problems; has difficulty sequencing information or events; exhibits of difficulty using steps involved in math operations; shows difficulty understanding fractions; is challenged making change and handling money; displays difficulty recognizing patterns when adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing; has difficulty putting language to math processes; has difficulty understanding concepts related to time such as days, weeks, months, seasons, quarters, and others as well as the exhibits of

difficulty organizing problems on the page, keeping numbers lined up, following through on long division problems.

### *Dysgraphia*

Children with this type of learning disability have writing or fine motor skills deficit. Some of the specific symptoms are: may have illegible printing and cursive writing (despite appropriate time and attention given the task); shows inconsistencies: mixtures of print and cursive, upper and lower case, or irregular sizes, shapes or slant of letters; has unfinished words or letters, omitted words; inconsistent spacing between words and letters; exhibits strange wrist, body or paper position; has difficulty pre-visualizing letter formation; copying or writing is slow or labored; shows poor spatial planning on paper; has cramped or unusual grip/may complain of sore hand; and has great difficulty thinking and writing at the same time (taking notes, creative writing).

### *Dyspraxia*

Children with this type of learning disability have problems with motor coordination. Some of the specific symptoms are: exhibits poor balance; may appear clumsy; may frequently stumble; shows difficulty with motor planning; demonstrates inability to coordinate both sides of the body; has poor hand-eye coordination; exhibits weakness in the ability to organize self and belongings; shows possible sensitivity to touch; may be distressed by loud noises or constant noises like the ticking of a clock or someone tapping a pencil; may break things or choose toys that do not require skilled manipulation; has difficulty with fine motor tasks such as coloring between the lines, putting puzzles together; cutting accurately or pasting neatly; and irritated by scratchy, rough, tight or heavy clothing.

### *Central Auditory Processing Disorder*

Children with this type of learning disability have difficulty processing and remembering language-related tasks. Some specific symptoms are: has difficulty processing and remembering language-related tasks but may have no trouble interpreting or recalling non-verbal environmental sounds, music, others; may process thoughts and ideas slowly and have difficulty explaining them; misspells and mispronounces similar-sounding words or omits syllables; confuses similar-sounding words (celery/salary; belt/built; three/free; jab/job; bash/batch); may be confused by figurative language (metaphor, similes) or misunderstand puns and jokes; interprets words too literally; often is distracted by background sounds/noises; finds it difficult to stay focused on or remember a verbal presentation or lecture; may misinterpret or have difficulty remembering oral directions; difficulty following directions in a series; has difficulty comprehending complex sentence structure or rapid speech; “ignores” people, especially if engrossed; and says “What?” a lot, even when he has heard much of what was said.

### *Non-Verbal Learning Disorders*

Children with this type of learning disability have trouble with nonverbal cues. Some of the specific symptoms are: has trouble recognizing nonverbal cues such as facial expression or body language; shows poor psycho-motor coordination; clumsy; seems to be constantly “getting in the way,” bumping into people and objects; using fine motor skills a challenge: tying shoes, writing, using scissors; needs to verbally label everything that happens to comprehend circumstances, spatial orientation, directional concepts and coordination; often lost or tardy; has difficulty coping with changes in routing and transitions; has difficulty generalizing previously learned information; has difficulty following multi-step instructions; make very literal translations; asks too many questions, may be repetitive and



inappropriately interrupt the flow of a lesson; and imparts the “illusion of competence” because of the student’s strong verbal skills

### *Visual Perceptual Deficit*

Children with this type of learning disability have visual motor problems such as reverses letters; cannot copy accurately; eyes hurt and itch; loses place; struggles with cutting. Some specific symptoms of this type are: may have reversals: b for d, p for q or inversions: u for n, w for m; has difficulty negotiating around campus; complains eyes hurt and itch, rubs eyes, complains print blurs while reading; turns head when reading across page or holds paper at odd angles; closes one eye while working, may yawn while reading; does not recognize an object/word if only part of it is shown; holds pencil too tightly; often breaks pencil point/crayons; struggles to cut or paste; and misaligns letters; may have messy papers, which can include letters colliding, irregular spacing, letters not on line.

### *Aphasia/Dysphasia*

Children with this type of learning disability have trouble understanding spoken language; poor reading comprehension. Some specific symptoms are: demonstrates poor written output; exhibits poor reading comprehension; shows difficulty expressing thoughts in verbal form; has difficulty labeling objects or recognizing labels; is often frustrated by having a lot to say and no way to say it; feels that words are “right on the tip of my tongue”; can describe an object and draw it, but cannot think of the word for it; may be depressed or have feelings of sadness; and has difficulty getting jokes.

## **METHOD**

The researcher used the descriptive-survey method in its baseline data, which is to see the general picture of the population and the nature of its existing condition. The study was conducted in the public primary schools in Nonthaburi, one of the central provinces of Thailand in the Southeast Asia which is administratively divided into six districts, namely: Muang Nonthaburi, Pak Kret, Bang Kruai, Bang Bua Thong, Bang Yai and Sai Noi. The respondents were teachers employed in 79 public primary schools in Nonthaburi, Thailand during the school year 2011-2012. The stratified sampling method was used to include male and female general education teachers. The sampling fraction for each district has been taken in the same proportion as the district has in the population. Respondents whose names fall on the inclusive odd numbers on the list of teachers in every district issued by the Nonthaburi Educational centres were selected from the population of 1,378 teachers. In order to determine the sample size needed to conduct the current study, Slovin’s formula was used to provide the number of respondents needed. Thus, 310 respondents were selected from the whole population of 1,378 through a stratified random sampling wherein respondents whose names fall on the inclusive odd numbers on the list of teachers in every district issued by the Nonthaburi Educational centres had been included.

## **Research Instrument**

The questionnaire was adapted from the Opinion Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities or ORI by Antonak and Larrivee (1995). The scale is a modified version of the ORI constructed by Larrivee and Cook in 1979.

For this study, the researcher modified the ORI survey questionnaire to fit with the current study. It is translated then to Thai Language to suit spoken language of the respondents. In the original ORI instrument, the Part 1 which is demographics has been reduced from having 13 sections to 7 sections which correspond to the variables of the current investigation. The Part 2 of the ORI questionnaire which became the Part 3 of the researcher’s instrument

covers the statements regarding teachers' perspectives towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities are retained however slight modification in the directions was made to make it pleasant to the participants. The Part 3 of the ORI instrument which is the teachers' thought on the benefits of inclusion was removed and the Part 2 of the ORI was placed. As a result of the modifications, the researcher came up with the new research tool which is divided into three parts namely: Part 1: Profile, Part 2: Knowledge on the legislation and LD symptoms and Part 3: Teachers' Attitude Scale towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.

The modified-translated-to-Thai-Language instrument was piloted to explore the feasibility, utility, and reliability of using the modified ORI (The Opinion Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities Survey) as a survey questionnaire with teachers in Thailand. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether the translation of the ORI into the Thai language and the length of the survey were appropriate, as well as the clarity of the questions. The pilot study determined whether the Thai versions of the modified ORI survey questions are ambiguous after translation. In addition, it examined the questions for cultural relevance. Ten Thai general education teachers in Nonthaburi Province were selected to evaluate the effectiveness of the survey questionnaire. These ten teachers were excluded from the sample for the actual investigation.

The researcher's research tool was validated by three experts from the Philippines and Thailand. The validators' suggestions were incorporated to come up with the final questionnaire. Moreover, the tool was subjected to a try in another province called Rayong among ten Thai public primary school teachers. The results were collected and submitted to the Research Department of the Graduate School Holy Cross of Davao College, Inc in Davao City, Philippines for reliability testing. The result of the validity was favorable and the reliability of the instrument has a Cronbach's Alpha of .714. The final reproduction of the instrument was determined after the revision and refinement of the questionnaire.

Part 1 of the questionnaire determines the profile of the respondents. It covers the sex, age, degree held, years of teaching experience, specialization, training in special education and experience in teaching students with disabilities in classroom. Part 2 determines the level of knowledge of the Thai public primary school teachers in terms of provision of legislation and symptoms of learning disabilities.

Part 3 addresses the degree of attitude toward integration as well as teachers' thoughts on the placement of students with LD by utilizing a survey that includes 28 items constructed in statement format. The 28 items are categorized into: (1) beliefs (core perspectives towards inclusion), (2) feelings or expected outcomes of inclusion and (3) actions or classroom practices.

A five-point Likert-type scale allows teachers to select their degree of agreement with the statements, with 5 as Strongly Agree (SA) and 1 as Strongly Disagree (SD). Questions probe the willingness, particularly of teachers, to work with students with learning disabilities and ask for the respondents' beliefs about appropriate educational placements for students with learning disabilities. The sum of responses to the scale ranges from 28 to 140, with a higher score indicating a more favorable attitude. This method of summation is adapted from Antonak, et.al (1995) where both positively and negatively stated statements are summed up to determine the degree of the opinion towards the entire indicators.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

Due to the political climate in Thailand, teachers are often reluctant to share their perceptions. However, in this study, the educational directors of Nonthaburi government have been

notified and approved the survey prior to its distribution. While this provided a safer climate for teachers to participate, it also provided a strong incentive for teachers to participate to answer the survey, knowing that the Ministry had approved it.

The researcher visited the Office of Educational Centres for Areas 1 and 2 to acquire the correct information regarding the number of schools and the exact number of Thai public primary school teachers in Nonthaburi Province. After which, the researcher sent a letter of permission to the Directors of both Educational Centres to conduct the research study. The approved permission letters were presented to the Graduate School of the Holy Cross of Davao College, Inc., Philippines.

An approval for conducting the survey was granted. Eleven assistants were deployed to conduct the survey in the primary schools in Nonthaburi. These assistants are international teachers in English Language who are currently teaching in the six instructional districts of Nonthaburi Province.

The distribution of the survey questionnaire covers the six districts of Nonthaburi Province. The letter approved by the directors was attached in the questionnaire along with the short cover letter to the participants. The assistants were oriented with the contents of the survey questionnaire as well as the correct process of administering it. Moreover, the researcher advised the assistants to retrieve the survey-questionnaire immediately to ensure a 100 percent retrieval. The completed questionnaires were hand scored by the researcher to avoid prejudice. After the tabulation, the results were forwarded to the statistician for treatment and analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Thai Teachers' Profile**

Results dealing with the participants' profile show that there are more female teachers than male and mostly are aged 31-50 years old. Most of the respondents are holding bachelor's degree with a relevant teaching experience of six years and more. In terms of area of specialization, nearly all teachers are general education and just a few are from the other field and special education. Two thirds of the respondents have not experienced teaching students with disabilities in classroom and majority of them have not attended any training in special education.

A study of Carter (2006) asserts that the existence of special education services within Thailand has been evident for several years but is still expanding and attempting to train qualified individuals to provide educational services. The statistics shows that Thailand lacks teachers who are specialized in special education but special education training is not provided adequately and still inaccessible to all general education teachers. Furthermore, he found out that over the past ten years, the educational policy within Thailand has addressed issues regarding children with disabilities. The educational policy in Thailand appears to have rather quickly moved to a more inclusive practice toward individuals with disabilities. The rather rapid pace at which these policies have been implemented appear to have resulted in some difficulties associated with the provision of qualified teachers or teachers who are specialized in the field. It is argued that when teachers gain extensive professional knowledge needed to implement inclusive programmes they may succumb to it (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

Similarly, Leyser and Tappendorf (2001) report that teachers with experience in teaching students, particularly those with special needs, intensify their confidence to teach them. This is likely to grow which invariably alters their negative attitudes. Thai teachers perceive that

their professional knowledge and skills were inadequate to effectively teach students with disabilities in regular schools. Their inability to meet the needs of those special needs students may contribute fear and concern towards a reduction in the academic success of their schools.

### **Knowledge on the Legislation and Symptoms of Learning Disabilities**

The respondents have partial knowledge on the provision of legislation and exhibited moderate knowledge on the symptoms of learning disabilities.

The partial level of knowledge of the Thai teachers towards the provision of legislation concerning inclusion of learning disabled children is reflected in the study by Chitchupong (2004) that during 1990's, Thailand introduced several educational policies addressing special education services and has promoted education for all individuals regardless of disability. Although educational policy has changed quickly, the actual implementation of services has several barriers to overcome. Kantamara, et. al. (2000) added that the implementation of new educational policies in Thailand has not been supported but rather have been monitored by supervisors using checklists to look for evidence of knowledge of existing policies among concerned individuals.

The surprising level of knowledge of the Thai teachers might be impacted by a current research in Thailand that brought out and supported a professional learning program. The Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC, 2009) in Thailand, reported that after ten years of implementation, teachers in schools with inclusive education classrooms do not have sufficient background knowledge to teach all students effectively. It was found that many of the teachers have received no training in special education. It was also noted that the policy of providing education for special needs groups is not clearly implemented. Similarly, Thawiang (2006) studied the management of inclusive education in a school in Northeast Thailand and found that schools were not ready to provide inclusive education for students with special needs. Like ONEC, Thawiang found that the problems encountered included a lack of curriculum adjustments, individualized learning and teaching approaches, gaps in teachers' knowledge in special education and lack of experienced personnel for supervising and monitoring the instruction.

### **Attitude towards Inclusion of LD Children**

The Thai teachers had a favorable attitude towards inclusion of LD children in regular classrooms in terms of their beliefs or the core perspectives, feelings or expected outcomes of inclusion and actions or classroom practices.

In the present study which investigates Thais' attitudes toward students with LD, issues such as demographic factors give impact to educators and influence their perspectives. Teacher's attitude in developing a child's academic achievement is a significant factor. Teachers prefer a hierarchical structure in which children with fully developing intelligence are higher on the order than children with disabilities. Teachers' attitudes toward the integration of students with special needs have been investigated by asking questions through three different modules of attitudes in order to clarify the relationships of teachers' perspectives.

### **Differences in Attitudes**

There are significant differences in attitudes among the Thai public primary school teachers when grouped according to six variables such as age, degree held, years of teaching experience, area of specialization, experience in teaching students with disabilities in classroom, and training in special education. It was found out that both sexes were insignificant factor in attitude towards children with disabilities.

## **Intervention Program**

The researcher designed a continuing professional development program to improve the knowledge and attitude of the respondents towards inclusive education of children with learning disabilities. At the end of this continuing professional development program, it is hoped that each participant: 1) has acquired knowledge on special education practices and legal bases; 2) has identified types of special needs and their symptoms; 3) has acquired the ability to apply accommodation and modification techniques; 4) has formulated an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).

## **CONCLUSION**

The Thai monarch has been contemplating on the implementation of the inclusive education in Thai schools. However, this idea is not well promoted in many schools due to lack of professional support like special education trainings and limited government programs. Thus, most of the Thai teachers are not fully equipped and qualified to teach special needs students in an inclusive classroom.

The Thai teachers are partially aware of the state's mandate that the government has to provide special education to the underprivileged and those individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities as well as special education that has to be provided in an appropriate form according to individual needs while they were aware of the ministerial order to enlarge educational opportunities for persons with disabilities through the promotion of integrated education in regular schools and the improvement of special education. However, on a positive note, the awareness of the Thai teachers on the symptoms of learning disabilities is well established. This scenario is attributed to the previous research conducted in Thailand through a joint effort of many researchers and the Research Center of Thailand that brought out and propagated the so – called Professional Learning Program.

The respondents have a favorable attitude towards inclusion of LD children in regular classrooms in terms of their beliefs or the core perspectives towards inclusion and neutral attitude towards inclusive education of LD children in terms of their feelings or expected outcomes of inclusion and actions or classroom practices. In general, the results showed a favorable attitude towards inclusion which means that the Thai teachers are willing to support the idea and practices of inclusive education which was part of the mandate of the Thai government.

The outcome of the present study presents the fact that there are differences in attitudes among the Thai public primary school teachers when grouped according to six variables such as age, degree held, years of teaching experience, area of specialization, experience in teaching students with disabilities in classroom, and training in special education. The results indicated that all variables except sex have a significant effect on the attitude of the Thai primary school teachers. It can be concluded that it is vital to consider the demographics of the respondents when there is a need to determine the attitude towards the issue.

Based on the level of knowledge and attitude of the Thai public primary school teachers, there is a need to design a continuing professional development program to improve the knowledge and attitude of the respondents towards inclusive education of children with learning disabilities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, it is recommended that: Thailand need to open up more educational training and qualification advancement programs as well as in-depth specialization courses

that provide specialized practices for implementing the special education strategies in their classrooms as well as offering teaching strategies for how to bridge theory and practice. Education programs and the actual delivery of these programs be developed in terms of curriculum modifications and adaptations that are appropriate for students with learning disabilities.

In order to promote Thai public school inclusive programs and special education services, the officials of the Ministry of Education may consider changing gradually the previous education system toward a system that now integrates children with exceptionality, provides teachers with scientific research and a model for change to help indicate the kind of educational change and/or program needed in order to work with students with disabilities, designs advocacy program to create less discriminating society and strictly implement the synthesized development program of this study.

Furthermore, Thai teachers need to promptly improve their knowledge on the provision of the legislation so they can implement the government programs accordingly. By all means, teachers must be willing to upgrade their teaching qualifications and positively respond to the existing legal mandates pertaining special education services provided for the special needs children.

Finally, the researcher suggests that there is a need to investigate specific details about teacher attitudes as they relate to inclusion, student learning, classroom management and the emerging factors related to perceptions of how inclusion will affect behavior and the school environment.

## REFERENCES

- Alban-Metcalf, J. & Alban-Metcalf, J. (2001). *Managing attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in inclusive classroom: Practical strategies for teacher*. London: David Fulton.
- Antonak, R. & Larrivee, B. (1995). Psychometric analysis and revision of the Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Scale. *Exceptional Children*, 62(2), 139–142.
- Antonak, R. & Livneh, H. (1988). *The measurement of attitudes toward people with disabilities: Methods, psychometrics, and scales*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.
- Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P. & Burden, R. (2000) A survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local authority. *Educational Psychology*, 20(2), 191- 211.
- Bateman, D. & Bateman, C. F. (2002). *What Does a Principal Need To Know about Inclusion?*ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education Arlington VA.
- Burnette, J. (1996). *Including Children with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms: From Policy to Practice*.
- Carter, S. (2006). The development of special education services in Thailand. *International Journal of Special education*,21(2). Retrieved on May 31, 2012, from <http://www.internationalsped.com>
- Center for Mental Health Schools (1998). *Least Intervention Needed: Toward Appropriate Inclusion of Students with Special Needs. An Introductory Packet*.
- Chitchupong, N. (2004). *Access to education of poor children and youth in Thailand*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Thai Population Association Bangkok, Thailand. Retrieved on May 21, 2012, from <http://www.internationalsped.com>
- Committee Affairs Department (2005). Committee news. *A publication of the Committee Affairs Department*, 13(38).
- Corbett, J. (2000). *Theories of Inclusive Education: A Student Guide*. London: Chapman.
- Council for Exceptional Children (1998). *IDEA 1997: Let's make it work*. Arlington, VA: Author. California University, LA.
- CSIE (2000). *The Integration Charter. Center for Studies on Inclusive Education. Department of Education Employment (DfEE) (1998). Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs (The Green Paper) London: Department for Education and Employment Publications Center*.
- Dapudong, R. (2013). Knowledge and Attitude towards Inclusive Education of Children with Learning Disabilities: The Case of Thai Primary School Teachers. *Academic Research International*, Vol.4 No.4, pp 496-512.
- Hannah, M. E. & Pliner, S. (1983). Teacher attitudes toward handicapped children: *Revised. School Psychology Review*, 12(1), 17-23.
- Harasymiw, S. J. & Horne, M. D. (1976). Teacher attitudes toward handicapped children and regular class integration. *Journal of Special Education*, 10, 393-400.
- Jenkinson J (1997). *Mainstream or Special –educating students with disabilities*. Routledge, UK.
- Kantamara, P. et al., (2000). The Challenge of Educational Reform in Thailand: Jing jai, Jing Jung, Nae Norn. In T. Townsend and Y.C. Cheng (Eds.), *Educational Change and*

- Development in the Asia-Pacific Region: Challenges for the Future (207-226). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger. Retrieved on April 25, 2012, from <http://stockton.academia.edu>
- Kantavong, Pennee, & Suwaree, S. (2010). "A professional learning program for enhancing the competency of students with special needs." *International Journal of Whole Schooling* 6.1 53+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 17.
- Karagians, L. S. & Nesbit, W. (1981). The Warnock Report: Britain's preliminary answer to P.L. 94-142. *Exceptional children*, 47(5), 332-336.
- Larrivee, B. & Cook, L. (1979). Mainstreaming: A study of the variables affecting teacher attitude. *The Journal of Special Education*, 13(3), 315-324
- LDAA (2005). Learning Disabilities Association of America. Retrieved on February 12, 2012, from [http://www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/parents/ld\\_basics/symptoms.asp](http://www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/parents/ld_basics/symptoms.asp)
- Leyser, Y. & Tappendorf, K. (2001) Are attitudes and practices regarding mainstreaming changing? A case of teachers in two rural school districts, *Education*, 121(4), 751-761
- Lipsky, D. K. & Gartner, A. (1997). *Inclusion and School Reform: Transforming America's Classrooms*. Paul H. Brooke's Publishing, Baltimore MD.
- Mitchell, D. (2008). *What really works in special and inclusive education: Using evidence-based teaching strategies*. London-New York: Routledge.
- Mittler, P. (2000). *Working towards inclusive education: Social Context*. London: Futton.
- Moore, C., Gilbreath, D. & Maiuri, F. (1998). *Educating Children with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms: A Summary of the Research*. University of Oregon.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (1997). *The Benefits of Inclusive Education: Making it Work*. Washington, DC.
- National Education Act. (1999). Right and duty in education. In ONEC, the National Education Act 1999 and Amended (2nd Issue) (pp. 7-9). Bangkok: Prig Wan Graphic Ltd.
- National Institute of Mental Health (2005). *Learning Disabilities*, Retrieved on November 29, 2005.
- Ochiai T. & Jimenez L.P. (2002). Pathways for inclusion in Japan. *Journal of Asia Pacific Special Education*, 2(2), 85-106.
- Odom, S.L., Wolery, R., Liebert, J., Sandall, S., Hanson, M. J., Beckman, P., Schwartz, I. & Horn, E. (1999). *Preschool Inclusion: A Review from an Ecological Systems Perspective*. Unpublished Paper
- Office of the National Education Commission. (1999). *The national education act 1999*. Bangkok: Prig Wan Graphic Ltd.
- Office of the National Education Commission. (2009). *Summary report: 9 years of educational reform (1999-2008)*. Bangkok: VTC Communication Ltd.
- Rose, R. (2001). Primary school teacher perceptions of the conditions required to include pupils with special educational needs, *Educational Review*, 53(2), 147-157.
- Rudd, F. (2002). *Grasping the Promise of Inclusion*. Palm Springs, CS.
- Salend, S. J. (2008). *Creating inclusive classrooms: Effective and reflective practices* (6th ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill/Pearson Education.



- Salend, S. J. (1998). *Effective mainstreaming: Creating inclusive classrooms* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). OH: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Salend, S. J. & Garrick D. L. M. (1999). The Impact of Inclusion on Students with and Without Disabilities and Their Educators. *Remedial & Special Education*; 3/1/1999
- Saludes, M. & Dante, A. (2006). *The knowledge and perceptions on learning disabilities in the cities of Region XI of the Philippines and a region of New York, U.S.A.* Master's Thesis: Holy Cross of Davao College, Inc., Philippines.
- Save the Children. (2009). Inclusive education policy brief. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from <http://www.savethechildren.org/>
- Scruggs, T. E. & Mastropieri, M. (2001). Promoting inclusion in secondary classrooms. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 9/22/2001
- Spear-Swerling, Louise & Lavote, R. (2006). Assessments. Retrieved: May 7, 2006. LD Online.
- Stewart, R. et.al., (2001). *General education and special education preserves teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.* Preventing school failure.
- Thawiang, D. (2006). *A development of an inclusive learning management: A case study of Nongkumpitayakom School under the jurisdiction of Khon Kaen educational service area 5.* Master of Education Degree Dissertation. Loei Rajabhat University.
- UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on special Needs Education: Access and Quality.* United Nations Ministry of Educational, Scientific and Education and Science. Cultural Organization, Spain.
- United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization. (2008, Spring). Policy Brief (N 3). Inclusion: Halfway to Dakar - where are we? Editorial by Nicholas Burnett. Author.
- United Nations. (2006). Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Retrieved June 24, 2009, from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=12&pid=150>
- Yacoub, Y. (2000). Higher education and manpower planning in Lebanon. <http://www.academicjournals.org/err/pdf/pdf%202009/apr/elzein.pdf>